

OPPOSITE WILLIAMSPORT,

June 25, 1863.

His Excellency President DAVIS, Richmond:

Mr. PRESIDENT:

I have received today your letter of the 19th instant, and am much gratified by your views in relation to the peace party at the North. It is plain to my understanding that everything that will tend to repress the war feeling in the Federal States will inure to our benefit. I do not know that we can do anything to promote the pacific feeling, but our course ought to be so shaped as not to discourage it.

I am sorry to hear that any controversy has arisen in relation to the exchange of prisoners. That is a matter in which our enemies have an advantage over us. Although we may have more prisoners than they, theirs are maintained at less expense than ours. Moreover, our citizens are much more accessible to them than theirs to us, so that the system of retaliation, if commenced, will not be on an equal basis. Besides, I am not in favor of retaliation excepting in very extreme cases, and I think it would be better for us to suffer, and be right in our own eyes and in the eyes of the world; we will gain more by it in the end. I hope, therefore, some plan may be adopted to prevent a course so repugnant to the feelings of humanity and the sense of right, and that the one you propose may be crowned with success.

You will see that, apprehension for the safety of Washington and their own territory has aroused the Federal Government and people to great exertions, and it is incumbent upon us to call forth all our energies. In addition to the 100,000 troops called for by President Lincoln to defend the frontier of Pennsylvania, you will see that he is concentrating other organized forces in Maryland. It is stated in the papers that they are all being withdrawn from Suffolk, and, according to General Buckner's report, Burnside and his corps are recalled from Kentucky. It is reasonable to suppose that this would be the case if their apprehensions were once aroused.

I think this should liberate the troops in the Carolinas, and enable Generals Buckner and Bragg to accomplish something in Ohio. It is plain

that if all the Federal Army is concentrated upon this, it will result in our accomplishing nothing, and being compelled to return to Virginia. If the plan that I suggested the other day, of organizing an army, even in effigy, under General Beauregard at Culpeper Court- House, can be carried into effect, much relief will be afforded. If even the brigades in Virginia and North Carolina, which Generals Hill and Elzey think cannot be spared, were ordered there at once, and General Beauregard were sent there, if he had to return to South Carolina, it would do more to protect both States from marauding expeditions of the enemy than anything else.

I have not sufficient troops to maintain my communications, and, therefore, have to abandon them. I think I can throw General Hookers army across the Potomac and draw troops from the south, embarrassing their plan of campaign in a measure, if I can do nothing more and have to return.

I still hope that all things will end well for us at Vicksburg. At any rate, every effort should be made to bring about that result.

With great respect, your obedient servant,  
R.E. LEE,  
General.